

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: May 22, 2014

Agenda Item: Camas Lake and Elkhorn Creek temporary waiver of daily and possession limits

Division: Fisheries

Action Needed: Proposed

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

FWP is asking the F&W Commission to propose for public comment temporary fishing regulation changes that would waive the daily harvest and possession limits in Elkhorn Creek and Camas Lake. The waivers would provide additional angling and harvest opportunities in advance of FWP's removing Yellowstone cutthroat trout and hybridized Westslope cutthroat trout from these waters. The Statewide Fisheries Management Plan (2013) describes WCT conservation goals within major drainages and individual waters. In both the Upper Missouri and Smith River drainages, the long-term goal is to have approximately 20% of the historically occupied habitat restored to secure conservation populations of cutthroat trout. In the Upper Missouri drainage, conservation goals for the upper portion of Elkhorn Creek include completion of a barrier and removal of hybridized fish above the barrier. In the Smith River drainage, the plan states that efforts are needed to evaluate restoration of WCT to Camas Lake. For Camas Lake, FWP will use a chemical treatment in late August 2014 to remove all YCT found there. For Elkhorn Creek, FWP will use electrofishing to remove the majority of hybridized WCT between the barrier and the confluence of the east and west forks. FWP has already completed environmental assessments for the projects.

Public Involvement Process & Results

FWP would conduct a 30-day public comment period and present final recommendations in July. Regulation waivers would go into effect immediately through Aug. 15, 2014.

Alternatives and Analysis

No Action: Leave the current trout regulations in place, which is 5 trout daily/10 in possession for Camas Lake and catch-and-release for cutthroat in Elkhorn Creek. This would not allow the public to maximize fish harvest before treatment/removal, which many view as wasting a resource.

Waive Limits on Elkhorn Creek and Camas Lake: This would satisfy the public's desire to minimize waste. These waivers would not complicate enforcement of fishing regulations. The only access to Camas Lake is a remote trailhead, and there are no streams in the immediate vicinity that hold non-hybridized YCT. Access to the proposed reach on Elkhorn Creek is along a road within the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area, which is frequently traveled by staff who can ensure that harvest is not occurring in nearby Cottonwood Creek, which contains a conservation population of WCT.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

Although these waters are somewhat remote, and the number of anglers who avail themselves of this opportunity will be small, "limit waivers" create good will and support and enhance the project goals of genetic purity. Waivers have been successfully used in the South Fork Flathead cutthroat conservation projects numerous times over the past five years and have been popular with the public.

Proposed Motion

I move that the Commission propose to waive the daily and possession bag limits through Aug. 15, 2014 for Camas Lake and the portion of Elkhorn Creek from the concrete fish barrier approximately 0.9 miles upstream to the confluence of the East and West forks of Elkhorn Creek.